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Viewing cable 06DAMASCUS68, APPLYING TARGETED SANCTIONS TO SYRIA

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#06DAMASCUS68**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06DAMASCUS68	2006-01-04 14:08	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Damascus

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/08/03/119333/wikileaks-bush-obama-passed-on.html>

VZCZCXRO2381
OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHMOS
DE RUEHDM #0068/01 0041408
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 041408Z JAN 06
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6460
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0694
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0055

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 000068

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

NEA/ELA
NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/SINGH
TREASURY FOR GLASER/LEBENSON
EB/ESC/TFS FOR SALOOM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/15/2015

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SUBJECT: APPLYING TARGETED SANCTIONS TO SYRIA

REF: A. A: DAMASCUS 5567

[1](#)B. REF B: DAMASCUS 6224

Classified By: CDA: Stephen Seche for Reasons 1.5

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. As post has reported previously, the average Syrian would welcome targeted sanctions that focus on regressive elements within the Asad regime. The best mix in our judgement would be sanctions that are phased, multi-lateral, and widely publicized. Most of our Syrian interlocutors concur that if done correctly, these sanctions would delegitimize those elements within the SARG perceived to be obstacles to change, strengthen progressive elements both within the regime and the wider society, and increase pressure on the SARG to substantively change its destabilizing behavior. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Financial and travel sanctions that target individuals remain popular with the majority of our Syrian interlocutors (ref A, B). They argue that targeting individuals would make clear for the average Syrian that the international community opposes the regime and its policies, but does not wish to punish the Syrian people. At the same time, targeted sanctions would also help delegitimize those individuals who pose the greatest internal and external threat to progress. Additionally, if designated individuals could neither travel nor conduct legitimate business, they would become an increasing liability for President Bashar al-Asad,s regime. Popular resentment against the sanctioned individuals would add to the pressure to change.

[1](#)3. (C) Syrians we speak with argue that future designations should be multi-lateral. Some tools for doing so already exist. UNSCR 1636 makes provision for designation of individuals named under the Hariri investigation. A case should be made for additional designations under existing or new UNSC resolutions. The USG designated Dhu al Himma as-Shaleesh and Asif Issa as-Shaleesh, cousins of President Asad, under E.O. 13315) a derivative of UNSCR 1483 - for their role in procuring defense-related items for Saddam Hussein. We should lobby our allies to pursue similar designations, under the umbrella of new or existing UNSC resolutions of both the Shaleeshes and any new Syrians we designate concerning Lebanon, Iraq, WMD, and the peace process. Though it is unlikely that any significant financial resources would be frozen by these designations (ref B), the naming and shaming of the most recalcitrant elements within the regime would delegitimize them internationally, which in turn, would work to undermine the hardliners domestically.

[1](#)4. (C) Pursuing multilateral designations would greatly multiply the effectiveness of targeted sanctions, but a carefully timed campaign to widely publicize the designations is equally important. Without media coverage and publicity to raise the profile of designations, the effort would lose its most effective element - &name and shame.⁸ The Shaleesh case mentioned above is a case in point. Despite the Shaleesh family having a high profile within Syria, very few Syrians at any level are aware the USG imposed financial sanctions on them. The head of one of the leading Sunni business families in Damascus approached us recently to ask why the USG did not aggressively pursue sanctioning criminal elements within the regime. When asked for examples of who should be sanctioned, our contact pointed to Dhu al Himma as-Shaleesh who, he asserted, took much of the 580 million USD in Iraqi funds the Commercial Bank of Syria illegally paid out in 2003 and has yet to reconcile with the Iraqis. Needless to say, our contact was surprised to find out Dhu al Himma as well as his nephew, Asif Issa Shaleesh, were already sanctioned.

[1](#)5. (C) Phasing in future targeted sanctions can maximize their impact. The first phase could start with those most

clearly the architects of objectionable SARG policies relating to Iraq, Lebanon, WMD, and support for the Palestinian rejectionist groups, and then extend to those continuing to support the original group in an ever widening circle. In addition to all of the Mehlis suspects, the first batch of new designees might include a core group of eight to ten, such as Asif Shawkat (Asad,s brother-in-law and head of Syrian Military Intelligence), Maher Asad (President Asad,s brother and commander of the Republican Guard), Rami Makhoulf (Asad,s first cousin and Syria,s poster boy for corruption), Mohammad Makhoulf (Rami,s father), Riyadh Issa Shaleesh (principal director of SES International) an entity already designated under E.O. 13315; in addition, we should push our allies to sanction the other two Shaleeshes mentioned above), Hisham Ikhtiyar (chairman of the Regional Command's National Security Bureau), Abdel Fatah Qudsia (Presidential advisor on Palestinian issues), and Mohammad Suleiman (Presidential advisor responsible for procurement). A second tranche of designations could then move on to this group's lieutenants and business partners.

16. (C) Most Syrians we talk to believe that President Asad still represents their best hope for change without instability. It is their fear of instability that stops the majority of Syrians from pushing harder for internal change. For this reason, they argue that sanctions focusing on individuals would help empower Asad to scuttle the regime,s pariahs. According to this school of thought, Bashar himself should not be designated at this point as it would limit our options and signal that the USG is intent on regime change, greatly limiting the number of Syrians willing to join us in pressuring the SARG for change.

17. (C) Comment. Pursuing targeted sanctions would send a powerful message to the regime and those associated with it: "if you are perceived to be proponents of the policies causing regional instability, you will be designated. If you provide aid and assistance to those designated, you risk designation yourself." Both internal and external pressure on the regime to change would likewise increase incrementally as the number of designations increased. If conventional Syrian wisdom is correct, the obstacles stopping Bashar from doing the right thing would proportionally decrease as targeted sanctions progressed. Even if that view is wrong, the same result will occur, as the supports of Bashar,s failed policies are eroded. In the end, the USG will advance its policy objectives by undermining the regime,s ability to pursue policies at odds with regional stability.
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